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## THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

16 February 1983  
Cy. 4 of 13

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : Major General Edward B. Atkeson, USA  
National Intelligence Officer for  
General Purpose Forces

SUBJECT : Intelligence on the Salvadoran War and the  
Utility of US Assistance

1. There is general agreement in the Intelligence Community that the war in El Salvador is likely to drag on for the foreseeable future as an essential stalemate. While both sides are deemed capable of achieving occasional local successes--some perhaps even spectacular--the overall military balance is assessed as even.

2. However comfortable we may be with our principal judgment, we should bear in mind that much of our information is derived from a rather narrow evidential base, and could be off by a considerable margin. For example, while the Community has cited 4,000 to 5,000 full-time, hard-core guerrilla strength figures for the past year, individual estimates stretch from as low as 3,000 to as high as 10,000. Current thinking within the Community is to widen the official straddle to between 4,000 and 6,000 to reflect our doubt. Evidence regarding insurgent strength has never been strong, and in the months since the election it has eroded.

Estimates of local guerrilla militia strength are even softer, with a 5,000- to 10,000-man spread.

3. An unfortunate aspect of the war from an intelligence standpoint has been a dearth of hard information

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[redacted] we may infer that US or other third country assistance programs may be key to the balance in the future development of the war. Political issues aside, we should expect to continue to receive a payoff in enhanced Salvadoran military capabilities with additional aid. Similarly, in light of the current standoff, diminished assistance would be likely to tip the balance in the direction of the insurgents. [redacted]

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7. Whatever our policy decisions in the near term regarding our aid program, we should bear in mind that there is much we do not know about essential aspects of the struggle. We should be prepared to amend our estimates and judgments as events unfold as more reliable information becomes available. [redacted]

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*for* Edward B. Atkeson

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